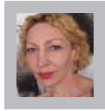


# The modern way



Catapult your art classes into the 21st century with **Susan Ogier's** crash course in contemporary creativity...

In primary schools we're adept at using a 'famous painting' to go with a topic or to have as a discussion point for linking learning across the curriculum. We know how to show children how other artists have used various elements of art in their work, such as line, tone, colour and texture, so that children might use similar techniques in their own visual work.

When the National Curriculum for art and design first introduced a requirement for teachers in primary schools to contextualise children's art learning by looking at artists' work, a good deal of this subject was defined by a visible rash of Van Gogh's *Sunflowers* and Monet's *Waterlilies* covering the walls. These examples, alongside others such as Andy Warhol-style portraits and William Morris-inspired prints, were commonly seen in schools up and down the country, as children were encouraged to either copy or interpret the great masters of the past. However, this approach can lead children to believe that all artists are just that – securely placed in the past. Nothing could be further from the truth!

There are many interesting and exciting ways to introduce and use contemporary art in the classroom, but sometimes sticking with a familiar artist can be a comforting fall-back for teachers lacking confidence in talking about art with children – maybe, on a practical level, they don't feel there's enough time in the day to experiment with new materials and techniques, and cannot take a risk by trying something new or different for fear that the lesson might all go horribly wrong!

With a little bit of reassurance and inspiration, though, this can be turned around to encourage a new generation of learners to experience the meaning of art in the 21st century. By being open-minded and using open questions, you can learn about contemporary art alongside your class, and develop their higher-order thinking skills at the same time.

## Conceptual art

Have a discussion about art. Ask children what they think art is all about. What's it for? Who makes art? What sort of people become artists? Picasso once said that we're all born as artists – do

the children think this is possible?

Show children some images that you've collected (these can include pictures of everyday objects and items from the natural world, as well as more conventional art objects). Ask them to sort the pictures into two sets: art and non-art objects. Ask them to justify their choices and begin a debate that questions stereotypical views of what makes something a piece of art.

Show the children work by the very first conceptual artist, Marcel Duchamp, such as *Bicycle*

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*Wheel from 1913* ([understandingduchamp.com](http://understandingduchamp.com)). What has the artist done in order to change everyday objects into a new artwork? Is this art? What makes it accepted as a piece of art?

Now look at the work of 2005 Turner Prize winner, Simon Starling, such as *Shedboatshed*, [tate.org.uk/britain/turnerprize/2005/simonstarling.htm](http://tate.org.uk/britain/turnerprize/2005/simonstarling.htm) and compare how the two artists have fused two items together in different ways to produce something new. Collect some old items of furniture or a selection of objects and ask the children to make their own 'Readymades' by combining found objects in unusual but aesthetically pleasing ways!

## Installation art

Installation art can take any number of forms but will usually be found within a specific or indoor space and will certainly provide a sensory or emotive experience for the audience. As such, it's a wonderful medium to explore with children as the work can become totally immersive and provide a holistic learning experience.

Find an image of a piece of installation art to show on your whiteboard to compliment a class theme, for example, Rachel Whiteread's *Place (Village)* from 2006–8, which might fit beautifully

with a science topic of 'light and dark' or a humanities theme of 'houses and homes'. Ask the children for their initial reactions to the work. Where is this place? Is it a real place? Who might live here? What does it remind them of? How does it make them feel? What materials has the artist used to create this work? What sort of materials do they think art can be made from?

Show them a clip on YouTube of the installation of this work in progress [www.youtube.com/watch?v=zyew8Ob9WEs&feature](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zyew8Ob9WEs&feature)

so that they can clearly see what the installation is made from (lit dolls houses). Use recycled shoe boxes or cardboard boxes of different sizes for the children to create their own mini-village. They might furnish the homes by designing rooms inside, and make roofs and windows with card and cellophane. Display the completed houses by organising a space in the corner of the classroom or school and create different levels for the 'homes' to be placed onto to make a hillside effect. Use batteries and circuits to experiment with lighting your village to create another purposeful link with science as well as design and technology.

## Issue-based art

Controversial or difficult issues such as climate change, environmental damage or endangered creatures can be explored in a safe and supportive way by using art to enable children to communicate and express their concerns. Last year was the 'Year of Biodiversity' and you can help your class to feel as though they're contributing to raise awareness of this issue by linking art with geography.

Use the photographic work of Yann Arthus-Bertrand, particularly his series *The Earth From Above*, to show children the wonders and beauty of our planet through this artist's eye.

## A rich palette

### MORE ONLINE RESOURCES FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL ARTISTS...

**The Saatchi Gallery** – [www.saatchi-gallery.co.uk/schools/info.htm](http://www.saatchi-gallery.co.uk/schools/info.htm)

**BALTIC school visits** –

[www.balticmill.com/learning/Education.php](http://www.balticmill.com/learning/Education.php) and **downloadable resources**

[www.balticmill.com/resource\\_downloads/index.php](http://www.balticmill.com/resource_downloads/index.php)

**Tate Modern Turbine Generation** –

[turbinegeneration.tate.org.uk/gallery](http://turbinegeneration.tate.org.uk/gallery)

[www.yannarthusbertrand.org/v2/home\\_us.htm](http://www.yannarthusbertrand.org/v2/home_us.htm)). You might introduce visual language such as pattern, colour, texture, shape, tone and line whilst looking at the work. Children might create 'earth from the air' pictures themselves by covering the floor or space in the playground with a polythene sheet, then using coloured sand or natural materials such as stones and earth, lentils and shells to make their own patterns and shapes. Take digital photographs and publish these on the school website to raise awareness of the importance of understanding and valuing biodiversity in your school community and beyond. Alternatively, use this as a starting point for individual paintings, encouraging children to mix their own colours and add texture, by incorporating some of the materials they've used into paint mixed with PVA glue!

There are a wide range of contemporary artists working with environmental concepts and using innovative materials and techniques to convey their message. Try visiting [greenmuseum.org](http://greenmuseum.org) for more artists and images to inspire your own project in the classroom – or outside in the school environment!

